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A message to the diocese on certain issues now...

[New York]

[1930]

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A MESSAGE TO THE DIOCESE

on certain issues now before us

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so called "Companionate Marriage"

delivered by

the Right Reverend William Thomas Manning

308
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Box 304

Cathedral of St. John the Divine
on Sunday, December 7th
1930

Jan. 2, 1931 DA

A Message to the Diocese

I HAVE reached the conclusion, very unwillingly, that certain conditions now confronting us require me to issue this Message to the Diocese.

Let me say first that you have given me every reason to believe, and I do believe, that there is no Diocese in our land which, as a whole, is more loyal to the Church, and to its Bishop, than this Diocese of New York. But during the past two years there has been a series of episodes disturbing to our peace and distressing to all who have at heart the welfare of the Church. I have felt it right as far as possible to maintain silence in regard to these matters although at times the situations created have compelled me, in discharge of my duty as a Bishop and Constitutional officer, to take definite positions. But there comes a time to speak and I feel that, for the good of the Diocese, the time has come for me to speak quite plainly of the situation as it stands, and of the chief factor in it. There is in this Diocese a little group of clergymen who, with what motive I do not venture to say, have been doing whatever lay in their power to make difficulties for their Bishop and to place him publicly in embarrassing situations. This group is a very small one relatively to the whole number of our clergy. It figures little when our Diocese gathers in Convention, but it figures largely in the newspapers, and it has the constant and active support of a Religious Journal miscalled Liberal, published in this city, which I think few can read without observing its personal animus and its extreme partisan prejudice. It is time for this unseemly agitation to cease.

At a time when we should all be united in our work for the strengthening of the Church these constant outbreaks and attacks are most harmful. Many people have spoken to me of their harmful effects upon the work of the Diocese, and upon our great task of Cathedral building, but this consideration seems to have

little weight with the members of this group some of whom have in fact shown, and expressed, their special antagonism to our efforts to build the Cathedral. In saying this I am betraying no secrets, and making no attack. I am simply stating facts that are known to all.

The whole Diocese knows that I have had to do my work as Bishop, and to carry forward the building of the Cathedral, in the face of, and in spite of, this influence, and that it has added greatly to my burdens. It is distasteful even to refer to such a matter as this but it has gone to a point at which it seems necessary to call attention to it openly for it does harm to the Church and gives a wrong impression to the public.

One instance of this is the recent agitation in regard to my sermon on The Apostolic Ministry, an agitation so unwarranted that it has amazed our whole Church, both North and South, and which almost everyone now sees was without excuse, and which was organized and skilfully carried out by this group. As I have said this organized group is a small one. Its members could I believe be counted almost on the fingers of one hand but they succeed at times in carrying others with them, sometimes through misunderstanding of the real issues involved. A notable instance of this has occurred during the past week, and it is this which has brought me to feel that, I must speak this word to the Diocese.

Some time ago I was compelled to express myself publicly in regard to the immoral and destructive teachings of Judge Ben B. Lindsey of Denver. At that time I sent to Judge Lindsey the following message, which was later published. "In reply to your telegram I beg to say that for Christians the moral standards given to the world by Christ are not open to debate. In spite of your assertions to the contrary the temporary so called "Companionate Marriage" advocated by yourself and others is not a marriage but only another name for free love. Your teachings would lead not forward but backward to those conditions which destroyed the old pagan world. In your writings you reject and hold up to contempt the Christian ideal of morality and purity. Such teaching is a sin against God, an insult to the

womanhood and manhood of our land, and should be condemned by all good citizens."

About ten days ago, to my great surprise, I received a printed notice from The New York Churchman's Association stating that at its next meeting the invited guest and speaker would be Judge Ben B. Lindsey.

It seemed to me that there must have been some strange mistake, or misunderstanding, about this. One of the officers of The Churchman's Association is quoted in the newspapers as stating that I "forbade" the Association to hear Judge Lindsey and "commanded" that the invitation be withdrawn. That statement is quite untrue and gave to some people I think a wrong impression. What took place was as follows. The President of the Association, Bishop Gilbert, was absent in Massachusetts. I consulted with him over the telephone and found that he felt exactly as I did about this matter. As I was in the City and he was not, Bishop Gilbert suggested that I should telephone the Chairman of the Committee on Speakers and express to him Bishop Gilbert's earnest request, supported by my own, that this strange invitation be withdrawn, both of us believing that the Association itself would have strongly disapproved the invitation which up to that time had not been submitted to it. But back of this invitation was the same little group to which I have already referred and, after consulting with some of them, the Chairman of the Committee on Speakers declined to withdraw the invitation, although he had now received the President's letter requesting this, and the meeting took place.

I have explained this because there has been an effort to make it appear that the Bishop of the Diocese behaved as an autocrat in this matter. It does not seem to me that there was anything autocratic in Bishop Gilbert as President making the request, and my joining in it with him, that this invitation be withdrawn which we both believed and I think had every right to believe the Association would itself disapprove. In conference with Bishop Gilbert and myself on this matter Bishop Lloyd said and I quote him with his permission, "I do not believe that any of our clergy will vote to uphold what is the most unclean thing I have ever heard of." Those members of the Association

who voted to hear Judge Lindsey have published the statement that they did so in order to uphold the principle "that it is both the right and the duty of the clergy to hear speakers on matters vitally affecting the welfare of the people to whom they are called upon to minister." But this was not the issue involved and so to state it is to becloud the real issue. No one I think would dispute that statement and certainly I would not. But it is one thing to go to "hear" a man, or to read his writings, and it is another and a different thing to invite him as your guest and chosen speaker and thus give your countenance and encouragement to his cause.

The issue of free speech is not involved here. I hold that it is both the right and the duty of the clergy to hear, and read, and inform themselves on all sides of these questions, but I hold that it was a grave mistake and a shocking thing, for a gathering of our clergy to give their countenance and endorsement to the former Judge Lindsey by inviting him in this way. The former Judge himself announces that this is very encouraging to him because he is quoted as saying "it is the first time that I have been given a chance to expound my views to a group of clergymen."

I hold that this action was wrong for the following reasons.

1. This invitation given to Judge Lindsey by a gathering of our clergy will unquestionably be used to secure other hearings for him in Colleges and Universities and other assemblies. I am told that already as a result of this invitation from our clergy the former Judge has been asked to present his views to the students at a well known College for young women.

2. The former Judge Lindsey's teachings as published in his books are contrary to the plain principles of Christian morality. "Companionate Marriage" so called is only a name for legalized free love.

According to Judge Lindsey's proposal a young man and a young woman are to live together and their union is to continue if they so prefer, the coming of children is to be prevented with the help of contraceptives, and if they have no children, their union is to be discontinued at any time that they may so desire,

or may wish to form some fresh alliance. If that is not free love, what is it? Would any man among us consider it a debatable question whether his own daughter should enter into such a union as that, and if not, how can it be a debatable question whether the daughters of others should enter into such unions?

Our work as Ministers of Christ is to fight such teaching with our whole life and strength, not to countenance it by parley and debate.

For all who believe in God the Seventh Commandment is no more a debatable question than the Sixth Commandment or the Eighth. But what has happened to us that a group of clergymen of our own Church should fail to see this?

Does anyone doubt how William Reed Huntington, or Leighton Parks, or Morgan Dix, or Phillips Brooks would have voted on this question?

Would Henry C. Potter, or David H. Greer, have approved this invitation, or have hesitated to beg that it be withdrawn?

3. In addition to all this the former Judge Lindsey stands disbarred and forbidden to practise his profession of the law in his own State. Judge Lindsey states that the decision of the Supreme Court of the State of Colorado was inspired by political enmity against him, and holds that he has been vindicated by action of the State Bar Association of California in regard to these charges.

The action of the Court in his own State as reported in the New York newspapers of December 9th, 1929, was as follows:— "Ben B. Lindsey, former Denver Juvenile Court Judge was today disbarred by the Colorado State Supreme Court on charges of professional misconduct, embracing acceptance of fees while he was Judge." The opinion, written by Chief Justice Greeley W. Whitford, says, "By his acts Lindsey has set the law at defiance. He was false to his oath as a judicial officer, and also false to his oath as an attorney and counsellor at law, and has thereby proved himself unworthy of the trust reposed in him by this court and, withal, wanting in that moral character which the administration of justice demands of an attorney and counsellor at law." "The

court revoked Mr. Lindsey's license, ordered his name striken from the roll of attorneys, and assessed costs against him". "The decision of the court was unanimous." It is however, the immoral published teachings of the former Judge which make the action of a group of our clergy in this matter so serious and inexplicable. As to his latest book I can only say here speaking as a Bishop of the Church that it is in my judgment one of the most filthy, insidious, and cleverly written, pieces of propaganda ever published in behalf of lewdness, promiscuity, adultery, and unrestrained sexual gratification, and I believe that this would be the verdict upon it of any clean minded person. The former Judge does his work largely by clever suggestion. He assures us unblushingly that he is "for decency, restraint, culture, real religion, and conduct based on the Golden Rule" and all through the book he sows his evil seed. It is only too well calculated to confuse the minds and break down the moral defences of the young or of those who are without clear moral and religious convictions.

As Dr. A. W. Hertzog says in The Medico Legal Journal for July, 1928, the gist of this man's teaching is "that if we have not the courage to live as our unbridled passions dictate we lack not only courage but spirituality." Judge Lindsey's propaganda for his so called Companionate Marriage, Dr. Hertzog writes, "is no more than a propaganda for crass immorality," and he adds quite truly that what the former judge practically says all through his volume is "Everybody is doing it so why don't you? The feelings which restrain you from giving in to your sexual passions are foolish, born from ideals planted in your unripe mind by parents and teachers who are old fogies, and who knew no better." Quite naturally the former Judge quotes approvingly from his friend Bertrand Russell the following: "In teaching my own children I shall try to prevent them from learning a moral code which I regard as harmful . . . I shall not teach that faithfulness to our partner through life is in any way desirable, or that a permanent marriage should be regarded as excluding temporary episodes."

And this is the man to whom some of our clergy gave their countenance and encouragement by inviting him to address them. Many of them I feel sure did this without knowing what the former Judge stands for, but I think those who arranged this

invitation and carried it through have something to explain to the Fathers and Mothers of our Diocese and to all who realize the seriousness of the present situation and the efforts that are being made to destroy the moral foundations of our life. Many will ask why give the former Judge all this publicity and that question should certainly be asked of the group of clergymen who invited him and brought him here.

I do not believe that this is the kind of moral leadership that our laymen and laywomen desire. I know it is not the kind of leadership that the Church of Christ expects of us who stand in her Ministry.

Dean Inge said recently that one of the most serious things in our life today is our lack of the capacity for moral indignation. There are things against which our indignation as Christians should blaze forth hot, and fierce and clear, and such are the teachings of this former Judge. I believe that the clergy and people of our Diocese will feel that I did right in requesting—not "ordering" but requesting along with Bishop Gilbert that the invitation to the former Judge should be withdrawn. It is unfortunate that the invitation was persisted in, but I feel that it would have been far more unfortunate if it had passed unchallenged.

For whoever may approve, or disapprove, and whoever may give or withhold support, I know that it is my duty as your Bishop, and that it is the duty of all our clergy, not to debate or parley with teaching such as this but to combat it with our whole strength and to brand it as the foul and wicked thing that it is.

The question involved in this matter is not the right of free speech, or the right to hear all sides of these questions, the question is whether the clergy of our Church, the guides of our young people, should give the countenance and endorsement of their invitation to a man who stands openly and publicly for legalized free love under cover of the term "Companionate Marriage."

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